

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID

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SUBJECT: GOVT WINS EARLY CORTES VOTES

1. EARLY PARLIAMENTARY SKIRMISHING HAS SEEN THE GOVT GETTING ITS WAY, WITH VOTING PATTERNS UNSURPRISINGLY SHOWING THE UCD AND THE AP LINED UP AGAINST THE PSOE AND THE PCE, WITH THE BASQUE-CATALAN MODERATES DEMONSTRATING THEIR SWING POTENTIAL. THE DIE IS FAR FROM CAST, HOWEVER, AND WE CONTINUE TO ANTICIPATE CONSIDERABLE SHIFTING ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS.

2. A KEY GOVT VICTORY INVOLVED THE (JOINT) LEGISLATIVE URGENCY COMMITTEE, THE CORTES' WATCHDOG ON GOVT USE OF DECREE-LAWS. IN THE LOWER HOUSE (CONGRESS OF DEPUTIES), SEPARATE (AND DIFFERENT) PSOE AND PCE EFFORTS TO DEPRIVE THE GOVT OF A MAJORITY ON THE COMMITTEE WERE BLOCKED BY THE UCD WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE AP AND THE MODERATE BASQUE-CATALAN MINORITY GROUP, WHICH IN EXCHANGE GOT SUCCESSFUL GOVT BACKING FOR A SEAT ON THE COMMITTEE FOR A MEMBER OF CATALAN LEADER JORDI PUJOL'S PACTE DEMOCRATIC. IN THE SENATE, NO DEAL WAS NEEDED FOR THE UCD TO ELECT ALL THREE OF ITS CANDIDATES FROM ITS OWN RANKS. (IN EACH HOUSE,

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MEMBERS VOTED FOR THREE NAMES, WITH THE TOP FOUR VOTE-GETTERS FORMING THAT BODY'S REPRESENTATION ON THE COMMITTEE: THE FOURTH SLOT IN EACH CASE WENT TO A SOCIALIST. THE THREE PRESIDENTS, I.E. OF THE CORTES, THE SENATE AND THE CONGRESS, BRING THE TOTAL COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP TO ELEVEN, OF WHICH EIGHT, INCLUDING THE THREE PRESIDENTS, ARE COUNTED SAFE PRO-GOVT VOTES.)

3. THE GOVT ALSO PREVAILED ON THE ELECTION OF CORTES REPRESENTATIVES (FIVE FROM EACH HOUSE) TO THE COUNCIL OF THE REALM. PCE AND PSOE SPEAKERS HAD URGED THAT SUCH ELECTIONS AWAIT THE NEW CONSTITUTION, AND RAILED AGAINST THE CURRENT COUNCIL AS ANTI-DEMOCRATIC AND VESTIGIAL. IN THE LOWER HOUSE, CONGRESS PRESIDENT ALVAREZ DE MIRANDA RULED THAT SINCE SUCH ELECTIONS WERE CALLED FOR BY THE POLITICAL REFORM LAW -- THAT IS, BY PART OF SPAIN'S CONGLOMERATE CONSTITUTION -- THEY WERE NOT TO BE PUT IN DOUBT, BUT SIMPLY HELD. ONLY UCD AND AP MEMBERS ACTUALLY VOTED, HOWEVER, ELECTING THREE AND TWO RESPECTIVELY (AGAIN, WITH A LIMITED BALLOT). SENATE PRESIDENT FONTAN ALLOWED A VOTE ON A POSTPONEMENT PROPOSAL (PUT BY THE PSOE), WHICH WAS DEFEATED, IN THE SUBSEQUENT ELECTION, THE UCD WON THREE SEATS, THE OTHER TWO GOING TO RESPECTED INDEPENDENT CARLOS OLLERO, AND TO A MEMBER OF THE CONSERVATIVE MIXED GROUP. THE LAST WAS ELECTED WITH ONLY 16 VOTES, BUT FONTAN DISALLOWED THE PSOE PROTEST ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE RULES IN EFFECT CONTAIN NO QUORUM REQUIREMENT.

4. THE GOVT WOULD NOT LIKE TO HAVE LOST EITHER BATTLE, OF COURSE, BUT IT SHOULD TAKE ONLY LIMITED COMFORT FROM THE VICTORIES. THE DECREE-LAW CAPABILITY CAN BE OVER-USED ONLY AT APPRECIABLE POLITICAL PERIL, AND FURTHERMORE IS ASSURED ONLY UNTIL THE NEW CONSTITUTION GOES INTO EFFECT. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AS FOR THE COUNCIL OF THE REALM, DESPITE ITS HIGH PLACE ON THE INSTITUTIONAL ORGANIZATION CHART IT IS OF LARGELY CEREMONIAL IMPORTANCE, AND ITS QUESTIONABLE DEMOCRATIC CREDENTIALS ARE UNDERScoreD BY THE UNREPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER OF ITS ELECTED PORTION. STABLER

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